

## **School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program (CFDA No. 84.201)**

### **I. Legislation**

Title V, Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 U.S.C. 7262 et seq.)(expires September 30, 1999).

### **II. Funding History**

<b><u>Fiscal Year</u></b>	<b><u>Appropriation</u></b>
1988	\$23,935,000
1989	21,736,000
1990	19,945,000
1991	34,064,000
1992	40,000,000
1993	37,530,000
1994	37,730,000
1995	12,000,000
1996	0

### **III. Analysis of Program Performance**

#### **A. Goals and Objectives**

Because program appropriations ended in FY 1995, this is a close-out report on the program. The goal of the program was to reduce the number of children who do not complete their elementary and secondary education by providing federal assistance to local education agencies (LEAs), community-based organizations, and education partnerships.

#### **B. Strategies to Achieve the Goals**

##### **Services Supported**

Most of the dropout prevention projects awarded in FY 1991 for a five-year period fell into one of two models: (1) restructuring and reform projects that affect a cluster of schools (a high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools); or (2) targeted programs for at-risk youth, which include such approaches as special programs for at-risk youth in regular schools, "schools within schools," and alternative schools. As shown in table 1, grantees in each of these two categories

demonstrated programs that included a set of components specified by the Department of Education and widely believed to be central to effective interventions (V.1).

<b>Table 1</b> <b>Element Implemented by Dropout Demonstration Projects,</b> <b>by Project Type</b>						
Element	Targeted (N= 48)		Restructuring (N= 7)		Field-Initiated (N= 28)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Parent involvement	28	58	6	86	22	79
Counseling	32	67	--	--	21	75
Social services	27	56	3	43	11	39
Challenging curriculum	26	54	7	100	12	43
Attendance monitoring	25	52	4	57	4	14
Community partnerships	23	48	--	--	13	46
Career awareness	23	48	--	--	14	50
Linkages among schools	12	25	6	86	9	32
School climate	--	--	7	100	23	82
Staff development	--	--	7	100	10	36
School autonomy	--	--	4	57	1	4
Alternative to retention	--	--	3	43	9	32
Source: <u>The National Evaluation of the School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program, Descriptive Report: 1991 and 1992 Grantees</u> (Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, Inc., unpublished report).						

### C. Program Performance--Indicators of Impact and Effectiveness

Between 1991 and 1994 the Planning and Evaluation Service, in cooperation with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, conducted an in-depth evaluation of selected projects funded under this program during that period. The evaluation

looked at how the program was implemented as well as whether the programs improved academic outcomes, such as dropout rates, attendance rates, and test scores. Sixteen targeted programs and five school-wide restructuring programs were studied at the middle- and high school levels.

### **Targeted Programs**

Overall, many targeted projects had limited scope rather than amounting to comprehensive interventions. Projects were generally successful in creating an accepting and supportive environment, for all or part of the school day, featuring extra attention and special services (V.2).

- Some success in promoting challenging and innovative curriculum and instruction, or at least energetic traditional teaching, was observed where projects could select appropriate teachers; in other sites, classroom instruction was often undistinguished.
- Various disruptions affected some projects' ability to sustain or strengthen their interventions: fiscal crises, hiring freezes, student recruiting obstacles, and staff disagreements.

Little consistent or sustained evidence of positive effects on students' academic or affective outcomes was found relative to randomly assigned control groups. Findings of "no impact" for most of the targeted dropout prevention programs evaluated means that the demonstration programs were about as effective as existing approaches for helping high-risk students. However, findings indicate that alternative schools have potential for success in dropout prevention (V.3).

- At the middle-school level, intensive programs did improve grade promotion and reduce the rate of dropping out, but did not improve student grades or test scores. Students in high-intensity middle-school programs generally remained in the programs for the full school day. Their classes were smaller than those of regular middle-school classes and they were given accelerated curricula designed to help them catch up to their age peers.
- At the high school level, GED programs helped students obtain GED certificates. Like alternative high schools, GED programs provided access to counseling, personalized attention, and linkages with social services. Unlike alternative high schools, GED programs were smaller, typically enrolling no more than 100 students at a time, and shorter, leading to GED certificates within 9 to 24 months. Even though GED programs had some effect, two out of three students who enrolled eventually dropped out without obtaining a GED.

- Alternative high schools did not reduce the dropout rate or increase the rate of high school completion, even though the programs offered innovative and comprehensive services to students and were generally well implemented. One explanation is that many control group members actively sought other educational options, including the regular high schools.

### **Schoolwide Restructuring Programs**

Restructuring initiatives progressed best where they were an integral part of, or at least consistent with, a broad district or state vision for school change. Most of the restructuring efforts faded or changed direction over several years, usually because of fiscal problems or turnover in district or school leadership (V.2).

- Although all restructuring projects envisioned broad systemic change, they also devoted substantial resources to supporting and strengthening services to students to respond in urgent and immediate needs.

No consistently positive effects were found on outcomes for students enrolled in restructuring schools relative to those for students in matched comparison schools (V.4).

- Despite efforts to improve school climate and autonomy and promote professional development, restructuring projects had negligible effects on school climate, staff autonomy, or the extent of in-service professional development as perceived by teachers.

## **IV. Planned Studies**

None.

## **V. Sources of Information**

1. The National Evaluation of the School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program, Descriptive Report: 1991 and 1992 Grantees (Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, Inc., unpublished report).
2. Helping Kids Succeed: Implementation of the School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program (Princeton, N.J.: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., forthcoming).
3. Impacts of Dropout Prevention Programs (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., forthcoming).

4. Impacts of School Restructuring Initiatives (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., forthcoming).

## **VI. Contacts for Further Information**

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